

RACIAL HARMONY FORUM

**APRIL 18, 2002
STOCKTON CIVIC AUDITORIUM
525 NORTH CENTER STREET
STOCKTON CALIFORNIA**

The Racial Harmony Forum began on the above date at 6:10 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Bishop Stephen Blaire, Diocese of Stockton
Chief Edward Chavez, Stockton Police Department
Roger Coover, President/Publisher, *The Record*
Pastor Bob Hailey, Unity Southern Baptist Church/Metro Ministry
Evelyn Asia for Dennis Lee, President, Central Valley Asian-American Chamber of Commerce
Janet Lilly, President, African-American Chamber of Commerce
Scott Mitchell, Youth Advisory Commissioner
George Ridler, Superintendent, Stockton Unified School District
Jose Rodriguez, Exec. Director, Council for the Spanish Speaking Director, Council for the Spanish Speaking (El Concilio)
Willie Douglas, NAACP
Jose Rivera, Administrator, Kaiser Permanente
Breanne Robertson, Youth Advisory Commissioner
Gary Gillis, Chief, City of Stockton Fire Department
Rabbi Jason Gwasdoff, Temple Israel

Ms. Robertson announced that she had set up a booth related to housing discrimination after researching the different aspects regarding race, age, and disability. She invited all to review the display and stated that there were fliers available for those interested in becoming a tester for San Joaquin Fair Housing and fliers on how to recognize discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Mayor Podesto thanked everyone for attending.

PRESENTATIONS

The following groups' representatives made presentations before the Task Force:

DR. DORA LEE WONG

Dr. Wong, Lay Leader of St. Mark's United Methodist Church, spoke on the Chinese/American Christian experience. She recounted her family's history, stating that her father was born in San Francisco in 1878 and his father was born in China. Her

mother was born in Hong Kong in 1882 but was educated as she came from a Christian family, and was raised by missionaries after her parents' death. Her father joined the US Navy at the age of 13 and returned to China where he met Dr. Lee's mother. After returning to San Francisco, he sent for her in 1902. They had five children. After the San Francisco Earthquake, the family moved to Oakland and then to Arizona where her father worked for the government as an interpreter. Dr. Lee said that they had Mexican/Hispanic, white, and black neighbors and all lived in harmony, respecting each other. Her oldest sister was the first Chinese girl to graduate from high school in Arizona and then continued her education at University of California at Berkeley when the family returned to Oakland. Dr. Lee also took courses in pre-med at UC Berkeley, where all of her siblings graduated. She said her family was happy and content with what they had. She said that when she attended high school and UC Berkeley as a pre-med student, she felt no discrimination or racial animosity, and everyone learned to live together, accepting each other. She emphasized that it is important to have good relations with each other as fellow citizens and to accept each other for each one's goodness and kindness, overlooking color and economic status, or what language is spoken, and look at what is worthwhile in each person. This would lead to racial harmony.

REVEREND JOY PREISSER

Reverend Preisser, Chaplain of the University of the Pacific, said that diversity is an important focus at the University. She mentioned some of the people and programs that encourage the University's mission of diversity. She reported that Heather Mayne, Assistant Provost, has oversight for institutional diversity, and Ines Ruiz-Huston has oversight for multicultural affairs in student life. Their job is to enhance ethnic and gender diversity on the campus. Reverend Preisser said that the University also has a diversity-hiring plan. She said that a candidate's underrepresented status is considered an enhancement to UOP's educational experience to provide a well represented faculty, and black faculty has gone from 10% to 15%.

Reverend Preisser further reported that UOP recently received a grant from the Irvine Foundation Diversity Initiative Program, which will be used to recruit a more diverse student pool and aid in the retention of diverse students. It will also help develop faculty sensitivity, ethics, awareness, and the general education curriculum. The curriculum is a complete series of classes called "Mentor" that creates camaraderie and broadens students' mind to develop critical thinking. All classes move toward the stated purpose of developing citizen leaders or individuals who will embody the competencies needed to skillfully provide ethical leadership in a diverse society. All of these programs are created to help students challenge their prejudices and consider their beliefs and actions toward other people. She emphasized that this does not just involve a classroom setting, but also involves getting to know other people, overcoming fears, and realizing that people have more in common than they do in difference.

Reverend Preisser said that Ms. Ruiz-Huston is also the head of the Community Involvement Program (CIP), with over 120 students who qualify for tuition remission based on academic performance and their status of first generation college students. She also advises the United Cultural Council, comprised of fifteen different student organizations that celebrate their cultural heritages. The Interfaith Council is comprised of students from many different faiths, encouraging prayers from each faith to speak aloud for the community. There are two events remaining this weekend for Celebrate Diversity Month, and Reverend Preisser invited all to the Filipino Cultural Night on Saturday, April 20, 2002 at 7 p.m. at the Faye Spanos Building and to the International Spring Festival on Sunday, April 21, 2002 from 12 to 5 p.m. She asked everyone for suggestions and ideas that have not been incorporated into UOP's programs. She urged people to look at each other and see themselves.

Mayor Podesto asked how the CIP is communicated to the local schools.

Reverend Preisser responded that Ms. Ruiz-Huston goes to all of the high schools to speak to groups or one-on-one.

Mr. Rodriguez said that CIP is not well known and asked when information is communicated to underprivileged students.

Reverend Preisser said that Ms. Ruiz-Huston has been director of the program since August, but prior to that there was a lack of publicity. She asked Mr. Ruiz for a list of groups that would be interested in this information.

Mayor Podesto announced that the minutes of this meeting would be available after transcription by the City Clerk's Office.

RABBI JASON GWASDOFF

Rabbi Gwasdoff spoke of a Jewish tradition that is symbolic of a historical compromise, teaching that all humanity has one Creator and all are created in God's image, so no one can claim superiority. He said that peace at home requires a commitment to compromise and show love and compassion for all in the home. These teachings are also important in fostering racial harmony—learning to be colorblind and looking beyond exterior appearances to see the image of God in every person. He noted that the Jewish people have known tremendous suffering and persecution; however, they have always looked to the future with hope, trying to live with a value system that affirms the preciousness of life and the Godliness of every human being. He said that a personal redemption from slavery must be bound up with the redemption of the larger world.

Rabbi Gwasdoff spoke of a special project that is a model with great promise for breaking down artificial walls that divide religious and racial groups in the community. It was the brainchild of a Christian Lodi attorney who has friends in the Jewish and Muslim communities. He decided to bring these three groups together, putting politics and

issues aside for a day and confirming their common ancestry in Abraham. There is a Jewish rabbi, a Muslim Imam, a Christian minister, and a layperson from each religion, to form a group of six working for a common cause. A Catholic priest will also join the group. An event is being planned for the third week in June to bring these three communities together and all are invited. Details of the event are still being worked out but on June 23 there will be a simple program for fellowship. Rabbi Gwasdoff said that the process of meeting and working together has opened the doors of friendship and mutual respect. He read from a document titled *A Declaration of Peace*, repudiating terrorist acts as contrary to their faiths, acknowledging and respecting differences in faith, and affirming the common quest for peace. He encouraged every community to replicate this effort in small groups to promote healing and reconciliation among people of all faiths and races.

In response to Mayor Podesto, Rabbi Gwasdoff said that it is hoped that groups do not become too large, and he encouraged individual small community groups.

Mayor Podesto commented that he has been considering some type of gathering as a memorial to September 11.

PASTOR WAYNE BIBLEHEIMER

Pastor Bibleheimer of Quail Lakes Baptist Church said that he has examined himself for areas of subliminal racism and repented of inadequate compassion because of lack of contact with those who have experienced racial prejudice. He offered a public apology on behalf of his ethnic group and his denomination to those who have been victims of prejudice. He said that all must strive for reconciliation and humility, and there must be respect for other religious points of view and beliefs. Personal friendships must be cultivated across ethnic and denominational lines. He said that he has been personally enriched by meeting with interfaith clergy and encouraged congregations to reach out to each other. Noting that the Jews preserved the Hebrew scriptures that are a part of the Christian Bible, he said that this is a debt that can never be repaid. He said that his church recently had a tour in Lodi to visit other religious establishments. He reported that Quail Lakes Church hired an African-American worship leader and this has enriched the congregation and led to greater diversity in worshipers. He said that several weeks ago over thirty clergymen and business and civic leaders completed a forty-day period of fasting and prayer for the City, and many from their congregations also participated. He advised that all must ask God to root out prejudice in their lives and change their hearts toward their fellow man.

PASTOR FRANK LEWIS

Pastor Lewis, of the All Christian Center Church of God and Christ, said that a racial harmony center is needed, with staff and volunteers to provide professional help for racists and those being discriminated against. He said that racism starts with the family.

A center would create a safe environment for people to receive help about feelings of racism and to talk about issues. He reminded all that the Bible says to love your enemy. He said that racism is a learned behavior that violates the dignity of humankind and interferes with human progress.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

CAROLE LEW

Ms. Lew said that denominations divide the body of Christ. She said that people need to seek God's face and heart and what pleases God. She urged people to love each other. She said people should rise above labeling by race or denominational background and strive to please God.

GUILLERMO MARTINEZ

Mr. Martinez said that, through love, all will be one in Christ.

MORDECAI BEN HAIM

Mr. Ben Haim read a message titled *Reconciliation, Breaking Down the Division, What's in a Name?* He said that all men must recognize themselves as brethren despite vastly different cultures, languages, ethnic variances, and attitudes. He said that God is working to reunify of the twelve tribes of Israel.

PASTOR CHESTER LUM

Pastor Lum reported that a South American study of high-risk offenders in a prison run by a Christian organization showed there was 80% less re-offenders than in a general prison. It is felt results in the United States would be as good. He said that Christians of different denominations have come together as brethren in Stockton.

RICK NAFZINGER

Mr. Nafzinger said that his vision for Stockton is as a place where people of different races and beliefs come together actively seeking to grow in love and peace. He thanked the Mayor and those present for their efforts in this regard. He said that all are united in love.

CONNI NAFZINGER

Ms. Nafzinger said that she is working for peace as a counseling psychologist and a teacher on how to be one's own real self. She said that she believes in the oneness of all humanity and all religions. She said that people must find peace within and must understand each other through awareness. She said that she and her husband are working on a project called *Cities of Light*, and Stockton is a City of Light when it reflects the vision of everyone working together to build a community of love. She offered training in peace meditation and in unity circles to become spiritual activists.

REVEREND EVERETT JOHNSON

Reverend Johnson said that he grew up in Stockton and loves all of its citizens. He said that he is representing his Bishop, L.B. Johnson, who is hospitalized with a stroke. He cited the Bible as stating that all flocks shall be under one shepherd.

REVEREND THURNELL CLAYTON

Reverend Clayton voiced his appreciation for the racial harmony forums. He quoted an author who stated that content prior to investigation is a bar against all information to keep a man in everlasting ignorance. He said that the clergy must be careful of what they say and must lead by example.

PASTOR BILL CUMMINS

Pastor Cummins said that racial reconciliation in the community can begin with one small group at a time. He recounted that he befriended a black pastor and the two congregations have come together for many services and activities, and suggested that other churches could do the same. His church also decided to go into a high-risk neighborhood about a year ago to make friends, holding barbecues and providing entertainment and presents for the children, and the climate is beginning to change in that area. He urged pastors of different races to reach out to pastors of other races. He also suggested that every congregation adopt an area in a blighted neighborhood so racial harmony could be advanced in a relatively short time.

PASTOR WALLACE

Pastor Wallace recounted encountering segregation in his youth. He said that harmony means unity and it must start in the churches. He said that a fellowship must begin for understanding and communication is also a key factor in harmony. He challenged each pastor, rabbi, and priest in the community to reach out to one another. He reminded

everyone that people are created in God's image according to the Bible. He urged all to engage in dialogue with their neighbors.

Mayor Podesto asked if any members of the faith community preach racial harmony on a regular basis.

PASTOR BOB HAILEY

Pastor Bob Hailey said that the only way that the City can be changed is through the clergy, because church is the only institution that deals with the conscience of man. He noted that there are those who refer to the black race as cursed due to their interpretation of the Bible. He urged the clergy to have the courage of their convictions and deal with racism. He said that all churches must be motivated by love and respect.

CLOSING

Mayor Podesto thanked the faith community and the Task Force members for their attendance and input.

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